

Program Inspires Healthcare Professionals to Help Patients Kick the Habit

Issue

Despite significant advances in treatment for tobacco dependence, the medical community has been less than enthusiastic about addressing this preventable cause of death and disability because members perceive the problem as unmanageable. Healthcare professionals often cite a lack of training and time as barriers in addressing the issue with clients.

Tobacco use is a major risk factor of the three leading causes of death in Newberry County—heart disease, cancer, and stroke, and smoking contributes to all major illnesses and health conditions. According to the 2003 SC BRFSS, 24 percent of adults in Newberry County are smokers, which is almost the same as South Carolina's current rate of 24.3 percent (2004 SC BRFSS). In 2002, Newberry County death rates from lung cancer, stroke, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease were higher than or equal to death rates for the entire state. Finally, healthcare costs and lost productivity caused directly by smoking top \$2 billion annually in South Carolina.

Intervention

Through a partnership with the Living Water Foundation in Newberry and with grant funds from the DHEC Division of Cancer Prevention and Control, healthcare providers in Newberry County receive training in the US Public Health Service Clinical Practice Guideline *Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence*. Without the availability of Block Grant funds, this project would not have been possible because the funds fully support the salary of the health educator coordinating this project. DHEC Region 3 Chronic Disease Risk Reduction staff conducts the trainings, which include teaching participants how to assess a patient's willingness and readiness to quit using tobacco products through a brief intervention. The project's objective is to increase the number of healthcare centers that adopt the Guideline as a standard practice, so ultimately providers will be encouraged to help patients seek cessation resources and learn about the dangers of tobacco use. Initiatives include:

- Targeting all healthcare centers and providers in Newberry County including, but not limited to, physicians' practices, dental practices, Newberry College Student Health Center, and the Newberry County Health Department.
- Implementing a referral system for tobacco cessation services available within the county that can be accessed by individuals wanting to quit using tobacco products.
- Tracking the number of referrals made for cessation services. Healthcare providers receive a \$10 stipend for each referral they make.

Impact

At the end of six months, five healthcare centers, including the county health department, received training. As a result of the partnership between the Living Water Foundation and DHEC Region 3:

- Twenty-four healthcare professionals received training.
- A total of 150 referrals for cessation services were made, which indicates that each of these patients received a brief tobacco intervention from their healthcare provider.
- Another grant from the DHEC Division of Cancer Prevention and Control was received to continue this project for a full year.
- DHEC Region 7 (Charleston area) Chronic Disease Risk Reduction staff members will replicate a similar program with healthcare providers in their area.

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